



Home visiting in Kansas: Family-Centered Approach Results in Parental Growth, Continued Participation

Home Visiting Gets Results

When families invite home visitors into their living rooms – and their lives – they have the opportunity to gain skills, support, and knowledge to give their children a great start in life. When expectant mothers and families work closely with a home visitor, they are better prepared for the ups and downs of parenting, and their children are healthier and developmentally stronger.



Home Visiting Leads to Stronger Parenting

To ensure that Kansas' most vulnerable families have the support they need to help their children thrive, the Kansas Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program was launched in 2011 to increase the number of pregnant women and families with children birth to age 5 who receive voluntary evidence-based home visiting services.

The MIECHV program, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and administered by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), targeted two high-risk communities: urban Wyandotte County and rural southeast Kansas starting with Montgomery, Cherokee, and Labette counties and, in 2015, expansion to Neosho and Wilson counties. These communities face the state's highest rates of poverty, child abuse, domestic violence, teen and single parenthood, and unemployment. Kansas MIECHV has added 36 home visitors and caseloads to serve families in these areas through three evidence-based home visiting models: Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, and Parents as Teachers. Also, in Wyandotte County, a "promising approach" model, Team for Infants Exposed to Substance abuse (TIES), has been implemented.

What Families Say:

"Being a first-time mom, it was so nice to have the outside and neutral source to talk to."

Why Do Families Stay Engaged in Home Visiting?

KDHE asked the Center for Public Partnerships and Research at the University of Kansas (CPPR) to assess why families who enrolled in home visiting decided to stay engaged in home visiting programs or why they chose to exit the program.

We asked families what they thought ...

CPPR interviewed 27 families - including moms, dads, and grandparents - in the targeted communities of urban Wyandotte County and rural Cherokee, Montgomery, and Labette Counties in southeast Kansas. Some of the respondents were relatively new to the program, but most had been involved in the program for one to three years, or had re-enrolled in the program with successive children. All but three of the families interviewed are still engaged in the home visiting program. The three families who exited the program before completion indicated they did so because of changes in their circumstances, not a dissatisfaction with the program or their home visitor. These families' responses were consistent with those from families who continued in the program.

... Here's what they told us:

"My home visitor welcomed and respected my opinions, and let me decide who should take the lead during our sessions."

Families were happy their home visitors frequently asked for, and deferred to, their opinions and invited their input. Overwhelmingly, the families indicated they liked making the decisions about what to do during their home visits and what goals they would work toward. A home visitor might provide information or direction when the family asked, but supported the decisions families made, and never "pushed" ideas or activities on them.

Most parents explained that they and their home visitor worked as a team on what their sessions would include. A few parents added it was occasionally the child's actions that provided the direction, with the home visitor adapting the session to capitalize on the opportunity.

Parents who liked to take charge reported their home visitor was respectful and responsive to their ideas. Other parents felt more comfortable when their home visitor made suggestions for activities and goals, and led the sessions. These parents clarified they never felt that the home visitors imposed their ideas on them, but instead made suggestions, then queried, "How does that sound to you?"



Parents said their home visitors tailored their session activities to meet the specific needs of the family. Whether it was using sign language for a hearing impaired child, adapting activities for a child with an autism spectrum disorder, or just listening to parents' preferences, families wholeheartedly agreed their home visitors were responsive to their family's unique needs. Parents were quick to add that when they did not know what kinds of goals to set, or what activities to do, they liked that the home visitor offered suggestions.

Several parents indicated they valued the home visitor sometimes offering suggestions in sensitive areas like discipline, providing them with strategies they might not consider on their own. If they chose not to follow the suggestions, the home visitor was very supportive and non-judgmental.

"Working with my home visitor has improved my parenting skills and confidence, and now I feel better able to care for my children and family."

New parents said they appreciated the information and support they received from their home visitor and reported that working with their home visitor increased their confidence in their parenting abilities and choices. Many parents shared they were learning as they go, and they felt supported, not judged, by their home visitor.

Even more experienced parents expressed the benefit of input and support from their home visitor. One parent shared that it was helpful to work with an expert, even with her third child, because each child is different. Another experienced parent said it was great to get a refresher on developmental stages.

“My home visitor was respectful of my family’s cultural beliefs and values, and tailored our sessions to fit with my family’s preferences.”

Families overwhelmingly said their home visitor was not only respectful of their family’s beliefs and values, they designed sessions that fit with the family’s religious or cultural beliefs.

One family was impressed that their home visitor worked hard to understand their culture, asking questions or doing research between visits. Non-English speaking families reported how pleased they were that their home visitors provided materials and activities in the family’s native language.

“My home visitor goes above and beyond when working with my family.”

Families were amazed, and delighted, by the extent to which their home visitor would go to support them in their parenting journey. They were quick to offer examples of unexpected acts of kindness and additional services the home visitor performed to support the family.

Several families who enrolled prenatally said their home visitor attended the birth of their child. “I don’t think I would have gotten through my labor without her,” one mom reported.

Families also appreciated their home visitor’s accessibility and flexibility in when and where to meet. They loved that their home visitors encouraged them to call or text when they had a question or concern, but also acknowledged that, due to busy caseloads and respect for personal boundaries, their home visitors would not always be able to respond immediately.

“My family has connected to important resources, thanks to my home visitor.”

Many families expressed gratitude toward their home visitor for how well they listened to their needs and quickly provided them with additional resources. Whether it was connecting parents to lactation specialists, physical therapy, daycare providers, housing assistance or employment programs, the parents found the outside resources very helpful in achieving their family’s goals.

One parent said her home visitor often anticipates what her family needs before she even knows it, then shows up with appropriate resources. One family planning to move out of state said their home visitor is already connecting them with support programs in their new city. A mom who exited the program shared that when she mentioned job dissatisfaction, her home visitor brought job information to future sessions.



What Families Say:

A family shared that the home visitor learned how much their daughter loved books, so she always brought the girl’s favorite books to their sessions to keep the child occupied while she and the mom talked. The mom said, “Our sessions are always nice because my child is occupied with activities that she enjoys.”

Conclusion: What We Heard from Families

A family-centered approach keeps families engaged in the program, excited about home visiting, and empowered as parents.

The families interviewed overwhelmingly stated that their home visitor’s family-centered approach not only made them feel more confident and skilled as parents, it also established their home visitor as a trusted confidant, mentor, and advisor.

By consistently asking families to share their needs, questions, and desires, home visitors were equipped to tailor the sessions to meet their families’ unique needs, helping them make progress toward their goals. By respecting the families’ beliefs and cultural values, home visitors helped families feel more comfortable and in control, thus more willing to work as a team to take steps that benefited their children and families.

As a result of their approach, home visitors were able to connect with all parents, whether they were pregnant, first-time parents, or parents of multiple children, and provide them with the information, support, and encouragement they need to help their children grow up to be happy and healthy.

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pregnant women and families with infants and young children served 2012-2015

MIECHV PROGRAM AIMS:



Increase school readiness



Improve maternal and child health



Reduce child injuries, child abuse and neglect, and domestic violence



Promote family self-sufficiency



Improve linkages with other community resources

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